**South Carolina General Assembly**

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**H. 3573**

**STATUS INFORMATION**

General Bill

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Currently residing in the House Committee on **Education and Public Works**

Summary: Universal Head Start and Early Head Start Act

**HISTORY OF LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS**

Date Body Action Description with journal page number

12/12/2024 House Prefiled

12/12/2024 House Referred to Committee on **Education and Public Works**

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**VERSIONS OF THIS BILL**

[12/12/2024](https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess126_2025-2026/prever/3573_20241212.docx)

A bill

TO AMEND THE SOUTH CAROLINA CODE OF LAWS BY ENACTING THE “UNIVERSAL HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START ACT”; BY ADDING SECTION 59‑152‑170 SO AS TO ESTABLISH THE GOAL OF OFFERING EVIDENCE‑BASED HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START PROGRAMS UNIVERSALLY TO ELIGIBLE FAMILIES, TO PROVIDE RELATED IMPLEMENTATION AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS FOR THE OFFICE OF FIRST STEPS TO SCHOOL READINESS, TO DEFINE NECESSARY TERMS, AND TO PROVIDE PRIVACY MEASURES AND RELATED MEASURES.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. This act may be cited as the “Universal Head Start and Early Head Start Act.”

SECTION 2. Chapter 152, Title 59 of the S.C. Code is amended by adding:

Section 59‑152‑170. (A) It is the goal of this State to offer evidence‑based Head Start and Early Head Start programs universally to eligible families.

(B) Before January 1, 2026, the Office of First Steps to School Readiness shall produce and post publicly a plan to make substantial progress annually over five years toward offering evidence‑based Head Start or Early Head Start programs universally to eligible families.

(C) The plan required pursuant to subsection (B) may include:

(1) expansion of existing Head Start and Early Head Start programs;

(2) proposed applications for federal and foundation-grant funding;

(3) “Pay for Success” social impact bonds; and

(4) any other programs the office identifies would result in an efficient expansion of Head Start offerings. The plan should target expansion of Head Start participation by at least twenty percent annually.

(D) The plan required pursuant to subsection (B) may pursue on its own without additional legislative authorization or action, and within sixty days of the publication of the plan, the office shall commence those programs.

(E) For aspects of the plan that would require additional action by the General Assembly, the office shall include in the plan specific requests and outlines of legislative action needed, including budget requests.

(F) Within 120 days of the effective date of this section, the office shall begin the process of promulgating regulations to establish processes for automatic enrollment in Head Start or Early Head Start programs for eligible families and through visits to a primary care or pediatric doctor, and other medical providers, including through:

(1) a checkbox or similar mechanism on the paperwork for annual pediatric exams to consent to enroll in a Head Start or Early Head Start program; and

(2) a checkbox or similar mechanism on the paperwork for eligible long‑term foster care and new adoptions for parents and guardians to consent to enroll in a Head Start or Early Head Start program.

(3) Following an application requesting enrollment under this subsection, the office shall cross‑reference existing information to the extent possible to determine eligibility and contact the applicant to discuss any additional informational needs and how to proceed with enrollment if eligible. The office shall ensure that the Universal Head Start or Early Head Start program is included within any integrated application process for public services offered by the State.

(G) The office shall collaborate with the State Department of Education to facilitate greater collaboration between Head Start and prekindergarten and kindergarten programs in the State including, but not limited to, school visits and family supports to familiarize families with the public school system, cooperation around record transfers, and programmatic alignment.

(H) For purposes of this section:

(1) “Head Start program” or “Early Head Start program” means those programs defined by the federal Head Start Act, as amended, 42 U.S.C. Section 9801, et seq.

(2) “Eligible families” means families who are eligible for Head Start services under a service delivery model included in item (1).

(I) This State has a compelling interest in protecting privacy and the protection of personal information. In administering this section, state and local agencies, businesses, and any other entity, shall only request data necessary to administer this section and retain it only as required to administer and achieve the purposes of the section. Any personal information or data collected or obtained in the course of administering this section shall be shared only in a manner that has been deidentified and aggregated to the greatest extent allowable while still in compliance with federal eligibility requirements and every allowable effort shall be made to revoke access to such data should programs be eliminated or should there be an ineligibility determination. Personal information or data collected or obtained in the course of administering this section shall not be otherwise disclosed without the informed consent of the individual, a warrant signed by a circuit court judge or federal judge, lawful court order administered within this State or a lawful federal court order, or subpoena administered within this State or federal subpoena, or unless otherwise required by federal or state statute. Personal information or data may be considered deidentified if it cannot reasonably be used to infer information about, or otherwise be linked to, a particular individual or household.

SECTION 3. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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